

Rappahannock Christian Church – 5/8/11
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Communion Meditation

As the Old Testament reminds us God's ways are not our ways. God is quite "other" from us. This is a good thing, I am sure. On the other hand, we are also created in the image of God, and so there are some things about us that are like Him.

It is always difficult to describe what God is like. Our words and our images fall short. For example, when we hear from the Bible that God is our heavenly Father, it might be dangerous to say that God is like YOUR father. Some people have NOT been blessed by good fathers! On this Mother's Day it is tempting to say that God is also a bit like your mother. A mother nurtures and cares for you, right? She sacrifices herself for you. But even the very best mother must fall short of the love of God.

Nevertheless, these Elements remind us every week that God HAS nurtured and cared and sacrificed himself for us. As we come to this Table and we view God and Christ's sacrifice for us, I hope that we will remember Him today and put Christ in the very center of our worship.

Let me read these words for you from the Gospel of Matthew:

Matthew 26:26-29 – While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Jesus' Dying Wish

Our Scripture this morning comes, once again, from the latter part of John's Gospel. This is our 3rd week to spend time here in the very last days of Jesus. Today I thought it might be appropriate for us to keep on talking about Jesus Himself. This is one of His very last sayings, actually, while He was on the cross.

John 19:25-27 – Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Most of us expect, unless our parents die while we are still young, that we will care for them in one way or another before the end. Some of us, like Kathy and I, may be distant from our parents and so we are not able to be with them every day, but there are still things that we can do, like call often and offer encouragement. This is often the case in our country today.

Lauren's Japanese roommate's family, on the other hand, has a special section in their home that is specifically for her grandparents. Her parents and siblings live in another part of the house. In their culture it is normal for 3 or more generations to live out their lives side by side. The parents are cared for by their children and grandchildren. It's built right into their system, you might say. This is the way it used to be here in United States, as well.

On Mother's Day we think about our mothers; what they have done for us, and how we can ever repay them. As I wonder about these things, my way is to turn to the Scripture to ask what it has to say about the subject.

Now in the Old Testament we find quite a few stories and admonitions about mothers. Once we get over to the New Testament, however, references to mothers are much fewer and farther between. This is perhaps because while the Old Testament was compiled over many hundreds, even thousands, of years, the New Testament was written in the span of just one or two generations. There wasn't a lot of time to compile a whole bunch of stories about Christian mothers.

Let me present a small survey of mothers in the New Testament.

- The word "mother" appears about 100 times in the New Testament, but the mothers are almost never named. Remember the time that Jesus raised the little girl of the temple ruler? Scripture simply says that he took the little girl's father and mother into the room with him. We know her mother was there, but we aren't told her name. This is typical of these references.
- Motherhood – how mothers should behave – is not discussed at all. Jesus does not talk about it. There's not a section in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, about good mothering.
- On the other hand, Jesus does quote the 5th Commandment twice. This is the Command to "Honor your father and your mother..." On one of these occasions Jesus is angry with the Jews who are trying to create a loophole that will allow them to escape caring for their aging mothers and fathers. On another he tells the Rich Young Ruler that he must obey the Commandments, and cites the 5th Commandment as an example.

Jesus also said some things that we call "hard sayings" about mothers. This means that these things He said are either hard to understand or hard to accept. For example:

- One time Jesus was inside a house teaching the people. Someone came to Him and said, "Your brothers and mother are outside. They want to see you." Jesus grasped this as a teaching moment. He responded, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Then He turned to His disciples and continued, "These are my brothers and my sisters and my mother."
- Another time, He said, "Anyone who has left houses or fathers or mothers or brothers or sisters for my sake will receive 100 times more in this life and in the life to come."

The point Jesus was making in these sayings was that in the Kingdom of God our relationship with God is to take precedence over every other relationship – even the one that we hold with our own mothers!

When I read these sayings of Jesus and I ponder what He could have meant and how He wants us to apply these things to our lives I ask myself, “What evidence do I have of what Jesus believed *personally* about these things? What did He *DO*? How did His belief translate into action in His own life?” Asking this usually pays off, because Jesus practices what he preaches. Jesus says, “Love your enemies, pray for them that curse you.” But what does He *DO*? Well, on the very cross where they have nailed him He says, “Father, forgive them!” Jesus doesn’t just spout off fancy words. He follows His belief with action.

In our Scripture today we have another of the last sayings of Jesus from the cross. When, in His very last minutes, He sees John and His mother standing nearby, He speaks to His mother and says, “Look, this one here is going to be your son from now on. And John, this woman is your mother, now.” Scripture tells us that the apostle John took Mary into his home and cared for her from that day forward.

Now, one has to ask why Jesus would not have just let His mother return home to His brothers and sisters in Galilee. I’ll admit that it’s only my speculation, but I believe that it is because He doesn’t want her to return to the Judaic way of life. We know that some of Jesus family became converted after His resurrection. Some even became leaders in the Early Church. But at this point they were probably not believers. His mother, however, was a believer. She was His follower. We find her, named, among his company of disciples. It is my belief that Jesus put her in the apostle John's custody because he wanted to have her faith supported amongst those who also believed. We notice here that Jesus doesn’t say just say, “Well Mom, you just trust God and I’m sure everything will turn out alright.” No! Even as He is dying, Jesus takes responsibility for His mother.

The teachings of Jesus make it crystal clear that there is only One who must occupy the highest place in the relationships of our lives. But, for Jesus, in His very dying moments, to take care of His mother speaks volumes about how He values, and how we should value, our mothers.

Benediction

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:7